

NSC BRIEFING

20 December 1960

LAOS

- I. We must expect strong Communist reaction, in some form, to the defeat that the Communist and Pathet Lao forces have so far suffered in the battle for Vientiane.
- A. The initial Communist reaction is shaping up as a combination of political and military pressure.
1. On the political side, the intention is to build up international sentiment for a favorable settlement by calling for reconvening the International Control Commission and possibly a direct appeal for UN consideration.
- B. The initial military reaction is expected to be a covert, or semi covert, strengthening of the Pathet Lao--Kong Le forces in the vicinity of Vientiane and a build-up of the Pathet Lao forces in other areas of Laos.

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- C. A more massive Communist intervention is not to be excluded in our future planning.
- D. Kong Le's forces, [REDACTED] are retreating north of Vientiane in reasonably good order, and while they have lost in men and material, there is evidence that the bulk of these forces remains intact. These forces may:

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1. Regroup for an early retaliatory attack on Vientiane, if they estimate that the Phoumi forces are exhausted, or ill-deployed to deal with a counter attack.
2. They may continue to move north towards Luang Prabang with a view to seizing the royal capital of the country and possibly the person of the King. (Steps are being taken to assure that the King has the facility to quickly leave the royal capital if it is seriously threatened.)
3. They might possibly move north and east of their present positions to Xieng Khouang or to the present Pathet strongholds in Phong Saly and Sam Neua provinces.

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III. All of the foregoing reinforces our belief that the USSR, Peiping and Hanoi are preparing to provide whatever aid they feel is required to prevent the establishment of an effective non-Communist regime in Laos.

A. They have the capability to channel such aid through Sam Neua which is under effective Pathet Lao control.

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IV. The forces under General Phoumi have fought well in the battle for Vientiane.

A. Phoumi himself, however, has tended to be over optimistic with regard to extent and significance of his victory at Vientiane.

1. He is certainly ill informed as to the disposition and intention of the enemy.

2. He has only very limited reconnaissance potential, no combat aircraft of any nature, and only a limited number of light transport and liaison planes

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V. The Boun Oum - Phoumi government will require extensive outside military and financial aid merely to survive, let alone meet a vigorous Communist counter attack.

A. Even with such aid, large parts of the countryside will probably remain outside control of the Vientiane government.

B. That government might also lose a number of key towns to the Pathet Lao such as, for example, Xieng Khouang, Phong Saly, and even Luang Prabang.

VI. If the Phoumi forces firmly secure their position at Vientiane, a Communist-dominated government will probably be set up at Sam Neua.

A. The Communists will try to give any such government a national front flavor.

1. It would receive prompt recognition and support from the Bloc countries.

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B. The Communists' choice to head it would almost certainly be Souvanna Phouma, in the event they could persuade him to accept it.

1. Souvanna refuses to resign and has not committed himself.

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VII. We conclude that there is grave danger of a most serious threat to the very existence of the Boun Oum - Phoumi government over the coming days and weeks and that our policy and planning, in addition to the above factors, should take into account the very favorable geographic position of the Communist forces with respect to Laos, the ease with which massive guerrilla operations could be mounted by the Chinese and North Vietnamese Communists, and the extent to which Moscow, Peiping and Hanoi are committed to preventing Laos from passing into the control of the anti-Communists.

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